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PVN-OP-648-Excavation Report

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Site PVN 648

Site PVN 648 is located on a narrow strip of flat, high terrace that borders the Rio Chamelecon on the south, that river lying approximately 0.4km north of the settlement. The site is about 0.3km northeast of Site PVN 647 and ca. 0.6km south and across the Rio Chamelecon from Site PVN 598. The economic and political center of Site PVN 202 (Las Canoas) is roughly 1.3km to the northeast and on the opposite bank of the Chamelecon from Site PVN 648. A seasonal stream borders the site on the east and south. The settlement itself consists of 30 surface-visible buildings tightly packed within about 4,125m². The bulk of the structures are organized around two adjacent plazas which are, in turn, arranged in a north-south line. The largest of the edifices (Str. 648-1) stands roughly 3m high, has basal dimensions of 11x15m, and is located immediately west of these patios. The remaining edifices are generally no more than 1.5m tall. Excavations conducted here from April 2-8, 2008 under the direction of D. Rogoff and Z. Lee were limited to digging trenches that were 1m wide across Strs. 648-8 and 648-22, the first in the northern plaza and the second in its southern counterpart. The purpose of these tests was to determine when the physically salient buildings at the site were occupied and, to the extent possible, the range of activities conducted here. We were especially interested in ascertaining if Site PVN 648's occupants engaged in pottery production, a craft for which there was significant evidence at other settlements in the Middle Chamelecon valley, but especially at Site PVN 202. In all, 23m² were cleared in the course of this work, the recovered materials dating primarily to the Late (AD 600-800) and Terminal Classic periods (AD 800-1000).

Structure 648-8

Structure 648-8 is situated near the center of the northern plaza, the land over which it was raised ascending 0.4m across 8.05m from north-to-south. Digging here within Subop. 648B, D, and E was largely limited at a 1m-wide by 12m long trench that was excavated running northwest-southeast across the building's approximate center. Three additional excavation units, each measuring 1x1m, were dug northeast of the main trench to expose more of the basal riser on this side (U.1) than could be seen in the initial trench. Fully 15m² was cleared in the course of this work, digging reaching depths of 0.59m and 0.68m below modern ground surface within and beyond construction, respectively. One major building episode was identified in the course of this work which was directed by Z. Lee.

Time	Construction				
Span	Phase	Units	Strata	Features	Dates
1	-	-	S.2-3	-	
2	Str. 648-8-1 st	U.1-9	-	-	
3	-	-	S.1	F.1	

Time Span 1

The earliest activity attested to in the vicinity of Str. 648-8 is the deposition of at least 0.12m of a very hard-compacted, coarse-textured, brown (7.5YR 4/2) clay (S.3; its base was not located). Stratum 3 was identified solely within a test measuring 0.64m northwest-southeast by 1m that was dug

immediately northwest of Str. 648-8-1st's northwest basal riser (U.1). This soil did not yield any cultural materials within the limited area it was exposed.

Stratum 3 is overlain by 0.06m of a very hard-compacted, fine-textured, gray (7.5YR 5/1) earth (S.2). Stratum 2 runs directly beneath U.1 and likely served as the ground surface above which Str. 648-8-1st was erected.

Time Span 2

Structure 648-8-1st is a platform that is bordered on the northwest and southeast by terraces (U.1 and 4) that are 0.3m (U.1) and 0.21m (U.4) tall. Unit 1 measures 2.4m across northwest-southeast, ending at a 0.33m-high step-up (U.2) to the summit. Unit 4's tread is 0.73m wide northwest-southeast and is succeeded on the northwest by U.3, a 0.45m-high riser leading to the earthen-floored summit. The fill backing U.1 and 4 (U.7 and 5) consists of a fine-textured, dark gray (7.5YR 4/1) dirt. A 0.3m-deep probe dug into the building's summit revealed a fill (U.6) composed of a very similar soil in which numerous small rocks were embedded. A 0.5m-wide wall (U.8) was recorded running northwest-southeast across U.1's earthen tread, stretching from the U.2 summit step-up to the back of U.1's northwest facing. The base of U.8 was recorded as slanting down southeast-to-northwest from U.2 to U.1, suggesting that U.1's tread may not have been flat but sloped up an estimated 0.4m over this distance. Overall, U.8 seems to have stood 0.5m tall. There is no sign of comparable changes in the much narrower southeastern terrace which seems to have retained a flat upper surface. Unit 8 likely was a foundation that served to divide the U.1 terrace into at least two earthen-floored compartments that are set in a northeast-southwest line. A 0.21m-wide by at least 0.31m-high wall (U.9) was identified running northeast-southwest across the approximate center of the platform's summit. This construction may have served as a footing for a perishable upper wall that divided the superstructure into two rooms, this time set in a northwest-southeast line. The dimensions of these putative chambers is unknown.

By the end of TS.2, Str. 648-8-1st was a stone-faced, earth-and-stone-filled platform that rose to heights of 1.03m and 0.66m tall on the northwest and southeast, measured 7.06m northwest-southeast, and was oriented ca. 47 degrees. It was fronted on the northwest and southeast by terraces that are 0.3m and 0.21m tall by 2.4m and 0.73m wide. The tread of the northwest example may have sloped up 0.4m over its 2.4m width from northwest-to-southeast while the upper surface of its southeastern counterpart was relatively flat. A 0.5m-high by 0.5m-wide wall seemingly divided the broad northwestern terrace into two enclosures arranged in a northeast-southwest line. Another foundation, standing 0.31m high and measuring 0.21m across, apparently served the same purpose on the summit, this time dividing two rooms within the superstructure that are set in a northwest-southeast line. All architecture raised now was fashioned primarily of cobbles among which a few angular pieces of tuff are found. The rocks are set in a mud mortar, their flatter aspects directed outwards.

Time Span 3

After Str. 648-8-1st was abandoned as much as 0.48m of a fine-textured dark gray soil (S.1) was laid down, covering all but the uppermost parts of TS.2 architecture. Embedded within S.1 is a

moderately dense concentration of rocks (F.1) that most likely fell from TS. 2 constructions. Feature 1 was traced for 2m northwest and 1.4m southeast of Str. 648-8-1st.

Structure 648-22

Structure 648-22 is located on the west side of the southern patio, wedged between Str. 648-23, 2m to the north, and Str. 648-21, an equivalent distance to the south. The ground above which Str. 648-22-1st was built is relatively flat. Digging here within Subop 648C was limited to a 1m-wide by 8m-long trench that was dug northeast-southwest across the edifice (8m² cleared in all). Digging was pursued to depths of 1.01m and 1.19m below modern ground surface outside and within construction, respectively. One building phase was identified in the course of this work which was directed by D. Rogoff.

Time Span	Construction Phase	Units	Strata	Features	Dates
1	-	-	S.2-5	-	
2	Str. 648-22-1 st	U.1-8	-	-	
3	-	-	S.1, 5	F.1	

Time Span 1

The earliest activity attested to in Str. 648-22's environs in the deposition of at least 0.15m of a coarse-textured, poorly sorted, very dark gray soil (S.4) that contains many small stones (its base lies beyond our excavation limits). Stratum 4 was uncovered in three discontinuous locations 1.25m and 3.15m apart. Based on these exposures, this culturally sterile earth layer rose 0.23m across 6m from northeast-to-southwest.

Stratum 4 is covered, on the northeast by 0.11m of a coarse-textured, brown soil (7.5YR 4/3; S.3) that contains white, possibly limestone, inclusions. This layer is, in turn, blanketed by 0.14-0.17m of a fine-textured, dark brown earth (S.2; 7.5YR 3/2) the upper surface of which likely served as the ground level above which Str. 648-22-1st's northeast basal facing (U.1) was raised. Strata 2-3 are missing in the next deep probe that was dug 1.03m to the southwest. Here the U.6 fill (see TS.2) is found where these layers would be expected to appear in the stratigraphic sequence (we did not dig deeply enough in this locale to test for the presence of S.5). The same situation pertains in the following deep probe, 1.63m the southwest where, once again, U.6 is found where S.2-3 would otherwise be expected (this time directly overlying S.5). At the southwest margin of excavations S.2-3 are replaced by 0.21-0.24m of a very coarse textured, dark brown soil (7.5YR 4/2; S.5) that directly overlies S.4. As S.5 continued to accumulate during TS.3 it is hard to tell how much of this earth was laid down now. The estimate provided here is based on the distribution of stones (F.1) that almost certainly tumbled from TS.2 architecture, the lowest of those rocks coming to rest on the ground surface that was exposed during the use of Str. 648-22-1st.

These observations suggest that, prior to the erection of Str. 648-22-1st, the future building's immediate environs experienced a relatively complex depositional history. It is possible that S.3 and 5, given their similar colors and textures, were parts of the same depositional unit, a unit that was apparently missing under what would become the main bulk of the later building. We are at a loss to explain this absence though it may well be the case that U.6 was introduced at the beginning of TS.2 to fill in this gap and level out the terrain over which Str. 648-22-1st would be raised.

Time Span 2

Structure 648-22-1st was bounded on the northeast and southwest by substantial stone facings (U.1 and 5) that rise an inferred 0.7m directly to the summit and measured 0.6m (U.5 on the southwest) and 1m wide (U.1 on the northeast). The building measures 5.04m across northeast-southwest and is aligned approximately 125 degrees. Unit 6, a very fine-textured, gray ash (5YR 5/1) is the fill retained by U.1 and 5 and runs from their bases up to 0.57m (on the southwest) and 0.36m thick (on the northeast). In the latter direction U.6 is capped by 0.22m, perhaps as much as 0.34m, of an earthen fill (U.7) that is identical to S.2 (see TS. 1 for a description of that soil). The addition 0.34m of U.7 would have brought the level of the summit northeast of U.2 and 3 to the same level achieved by U.6 alone southwest of those walls.

Units 2 and 3 may be the northeast and southwest sides of a 0.2m-tall, 1.08m-wide stone foundation that marked the northeast flank of an earthen-floored room. This compartment is bordered by a 0.4m-high wall (U.8) on the northwest and the inner (northeast) face of U.5 on the southwest (U.8's full width was not determined). From U.2/3 on the northeast to U.5 on the southwest the putative compartment measured 1.33m across. Projecting 0.72m northeast of U.5 is a 0.24m-tall stone-faced construction (U.4) that may have been a shelf or bench (its northwest-southeast length was not revealed). The 1.4m intervening between U.1 on the northeast and U.2/3 on the southwest may have been another earthen-floored enclosure or a portico fronting the southwestern chamber.

All of the architecture raised now was made primarily of river cobbles among which were mixed a few pieces of tuff. All of the rocks are set in a mud mortar and have their flatter aspects facing outwards.

Time Span 3

After Str. 648-22-1st was abandoned an additional 0.38m of S.5 collected off the platform's southwest flank, covering all but the uppermost 0.29m of U.5. No sign of a comparable soil was identified on the edifice's northeast side. Capping S.5 by 0.29m and S.2 by 0.54m on the northeast is a fine-textured, dark brown earth (S.1; 7.5YR 3/2). Embedded in S.1 and upper S.5 is a light (on the northeast) to heavy (on the southwest) concentration of rocks (F.1) that almost certainly fell from TS.2 architecture.